

IN AND AROUND BERKHAMSTED

by Townsman

BY CANDLELIGHT

As soon as the power cuts started on 7th December, a rush for candles (not rushlights—sorry!) quickly exhausted shopkeepers' stocks.

Happily, an old friend of mine came to the rescue of some of his neighbours. He had a large stock of carriage lamp candles dating from before the first World War. They were plumper and shorter than the ones I remember in the days when we had gas on the ground floor but no piped or wired illumination upstairs.

What a ceremony we had at bedtime! Candlesticks were placed on the kitchen table and one match was used to light three wicks. Then we proceeded upstairs, the guttering light throwing strange shadows on the wall. Long after the light was blown out the smell of wick and wax pervaded the bedroom. It was not an odour that I cared for, though I always enjoyed sniffing a new gas mantle. This very special smell lasted for only a few seconds, and I much preferred it to the Californian poppy scent of the ghastly hair-oil which was popular at the time.

Candles, by the way, caused many a fire, especially on breezy nights when curtains were wafted over the flame.

BUT NO SLEIGHS

A friend took his small son for a walk over the Common a few days before Christmas. On returning home, the lad dashed up to his mother and said: "We've seen some lovely reindeer on the Common!"

A very nice Christmas short story, don't you agree?

CATASTROPHE IN CHURCH

Now for a longer Christmas story, taken from the *Berkhamsted Parish Magazine* for January 1875. It is headed, 'Terrible Catastrophe in Berkhamsted Church':

'On Christmas morning, in the middle of the Second Lesson, the congregation was startled by a loud thump, which, to the horror of all, was supposed to have been caused by the fall of a poor child from the gallery. Both churchwardens rushed to the spot and all the officials gathered round the scene. Not a trace of the child was to be found. Such was the force of the concussion that the body must actually have forced its way through the floor . . . As soon as the expected thaw sets in, the sexton will doubtless proceed with the necessary excavations.'

A footnote adds that with the exception of the thump, which was never explained, there was no truth in the report given above. The item was printed

to show the force and value of gossip, inasmuch as the story was current in the parish 'on the best authority' for the rest of Christmas Day and was doubtless still fully believed by all such as did not have the pleasure of being readers of the magazine.

By the way, the *Review's* ancestor, the *Parish Magazine*, started life nearly a century ago. I have a bound volume for 1874-7, and would like to inspect any earlier copies that may be available. To the best of my knowledge the magazine was started in 1873, but it could have been 1872.

LOCAL DIALECT

My thanks to a reader for the following letter:

'I heard two expressions last week which, if you do not already know them, may be useful for your collection of local dialect words. They came from two ladies living at Potten End, born in 1889 and 1892. One word was *fayn*, or *fane*, which, they said, was the way most people once pronounced the word "fern". The other was that, when they were young, furze-cutting was always called fuzzen-stalking. They added the useful tip that as it makes one's hands very black it is better to wait, if possible, until after a good shower of rain before cutting fuzzen.

'With soaring prices, strikes, and so on, I can foresee that the information will be of more than academic interest. I've just been told that I have no hope of a delivery of coke for the boiler until the New Year'.

HOLDING ONE'S BREATH

A reference in last month's *Review* to the old fever-cart prompted a reader to recall, that, as a child, he was instructed to hold his breath whenever the dreaded cart passed by.

Another reader, writing from Devonshire, says: 'I remember the fever-cart. When we saw it we got a little shiver of apprehension, wondering whether the passenger would recover. Scarlet fever was almost endemic before the first World War, but it was diphtheria which most people dreaded. I don't remember any other diseases for which people (usually children) were taken to Aldbury. One could go to the isolation hospital to make faces at convalescent friends through the windows'.

BEST WALKS

The 'Best Walks' articles which ran for a year and a half in the *Review* still bring comments—appreciative ones, I am pleased to say, though one family party, complete with pram, wished I had not chosen routes with so many stiles.

What especially pleased me was this letter from a Meadow Road reader: 'I really must write and tell you how much we have enjoyed following your wonderful walking routes. We were sorry when the series ended, but will enjoy walking the routes again in the future, as we have kept your articles in a loose-leaf folder. Thank you for helping us to enjoy the beautiful countryside around Berkhamsted'.

And thank you, madam, for an unsolicited testimonial! A number of people tell me they have filed the articles, and some have asked if they will appear in book form.

I had a lot to do with a booklet entitled 'Footpaths around Berkhamsted and Ashridge', published by the Citizens' Association over twenty years ago. It cost a shilling and the edition of over 2,250 was sold out in a few months.

Printing costs have increased to such an extent that a similar booklet would have to sell at 5s. I doubt whether there would be a great demand for it at that price.

COMING SHORTLY

Incidentally, several people have asked for additional routes. I am looking into this possibility, but for a change I am giving priority to another idea. Time, opportunity and space permitting, I propose to write about places of interest within an easy car or bus ride of Berkhamsted.

So, when the days lengthen, I may be able to make some off-beat if not off-the-beaten-track recommendations.

BEORCHAM *Continued from page 7*

in readiness to join the regiments which are sent for the protection of the coast of Hampshire'.

At the end of the paper appears the following announcement: 'Articles of intelligence, advertisements, essays and other literary communications, intended for this paper, addressed (post paid) to J. Webster, the editor, at the 'Herald' Printing Office, Berkhamsted, or to Mr. Adams, of Aylesbury, will be punctually attended to'.

READ IN THE COFFEE HOUSE

Then follows a list of agents to whom advertisements could be sent in Buckingham, Stony Stratford, Newport Pagnell, Olney, Chesham, High Wycombe, Great Marlow, Eton, Henley, Thame, Bicester, Bedford, Hatfield, Woburn, Oxford, Uxbridge, Banbury, Hertford, Hemel Hempstead, Aylesbury; 'and to Mr. William Tayler at his office, No. 5, Warwick Square, London, where this paper is regularly sent weekly and filed'. The paper was also sent to and filed at the Chapter Coffee House in Paternoster Row and Peele's Coffee House in Fleet Street, London.

It is pleasant to think of McDowall and his craftsmen and devils setting up type and printing a newspaper at Berkhamsted, knowing that a few hundred copies would have a wide circulation, and that at least one copy would be read in Fleet Street.